

# **EMBASSY OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA**

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## **Opening Remarks by Ambassador James F. Moriarty on International Women's Day 2009 Sunday, March 8, 2009 at 3:00pm**

Honorable Nurul Islam Nahid, Minister of Education and Primary and Mass Education, Honored Guest, Rasheda K Chowdhury, Former Advisor to the GOB and Country Director of CAMPE, Diplomatic Colleagues, Distinguished Government Officials, Representatives from development partners, Honored Guests, Friends from the media, ladies and gentlemen: Good Afternoon, Assalamualaikum and Nomoshker.

Before I begin my remarks, I want to express my condolences to those who lost loved ones in the mutiny at BDR Headquarters last week. May we please have a moment of silence in memory of those who lost their lives in that national tragedy.

Today, we are here to celebrate International Women's Day, an event honoring women's advancement. Women's contributions are crucial to development, international peace, and security. Continued social and professional progress requires the active participation of women in all aspects of life. In honor of women's contributions, the U.S. Government has officially celebrated International Women's Day since the United Nations established the global day of recognition in 1975.

As we celebrate in Dhaka, we join women - and men - around the world in re-committing ourselves to continued vigilance and action to ensure women's equality.

I am very pleased that the United States Government, through USAID, is hosting this three-day gender and development book fair. Raising awareness through information sharing is key to reducing gender disparity in every sphere of life. The books and other literature on display here will enhance our knowledge of successful approaches to promote gender equity. The materials we are showcasing promote women's empowerment and leadership. Through them, you will learn about women's struggles, women's achievements, and women's efforts to overcome adversity.

The United States Government has a long history of helping women in Bangladesh. Since 1971, the U.S. Government has provided more than \$5 billion in development assistance. While this assistance spans a variety of sectors, working to improve the condition of women is a crucial component of all USAID programs. Currently, key programs provide better maternal and

child health, prevent HIV/AIDS, reduce trafficking in persons, and create income generating opportunities.

One example is the USG—funded Grameen Shakti project that provides training to rural women on renewable energy technologies. Grameen Shakti teaches women to install and assemble accessories for solar home systems. Grameen Shakti has helped us train more than 1,000 rural women. The women earn a stipend while receiving the training. These solar systems provide clean energy while simultaneously improving income opportunities for women entrepreneurs.

Recently, “Ambia,” one of the women solar technicians and entrepreneurs, received a micro-entrepreneur award from Planet Finance, an international micro-credit organization. Ambia is an example of today’s women - determined to move forward to ensure a better and brighter future for themselves and their families.

The United States has supported Bangladesh as this country continues to make significant progress in many key areas: women’s participation in the labor force; gender parity in enrollment in primary education; women’s entrepreneurship; women’s access to health care; and women’s participation in politics. This is all very encouraging. In fact, the recent parliamentary election was a milestone in terms of women’s participation. More women than ever competed for un-reserved seats. Nineteen out of 55 female candidates won a regular seat in the last election.

When you empower and educate women, they share that knowledge. They share with their children. They share with their families. They share with their communities. Investing in women improves the entire society. When women are educated and involved in important family decisions, statistics show their children are better educated; their family's health and nutrition improves; family income rises; and civil society is more likely to flourish.

Throughout the world today, including in Bangladesh, women are increasingly agents of change, arbiters of peace, and advocates of education and health. Women are advancing opportunity, not only for themselves, but for their families and their communities. America is proud to partner with women who are making the world a better place.

Gender equity and women’s empowerment are essential for the development of any society. Amartya Sen, the Bengali Nobel Prize-winning economist, stated that nothing was more important for development today than the economic, political, and social participation of women. Women’s participation is not a responsibility of women alone - rather it is the joint responsibility of both men and women. It is not optional. It is essential for the future of women and for us all.

Our goal with this book fair is to change attitudes and raise awareness on gender issues - among women AND MEN. All who participate will learn of women’s struggles and their role in changing the status quo. I thank you for joining us as we celebrate International Women’s Day.

I invite you to visit the Gender and Development Book fair. I encourage you to empower all Bangladeshi women to fulfill their full potential in the global village.

On that note, it gives me great pleasure today to recognize our special guest, Ms. Rasheda K. Choudhury, for her contributions in Bangladesh, especially in the area of women's development. Thank you for joining us Ms. Choudhury. It is my privilege to announce at this time that Ms. Choudhury is a finalist for the U.S. Secretary of State's International Women of Courage Award.

I nominated Ms. Choudhury both for her efforts to launch the Bangladesh National Women's Development Policy, and for her many years of dedicated activism for women, children, other minorities and the disadvantaged. She has courageously, and often at personal risk, championed women's rights and the principles of freedom, tolerance, moderation and democracy. These are the principles that make Bangladesh a great nation, and I thank Ms. Choudhury for her steadfast efforts to secure these values for all Bangladeshis. I would now like to present Ms. Choudhury with a certificate from the U.S. Department of State that recognizes her as an International Woman of Courage. The certificate reads:

The United States  
Department of State  
In Recognition of  
Rasheda K. Choudhury  
Finalist, for the 2009  
Secretary of State's International  
Women of Courage Award

In honor of her courage and leadership in advocating for women's rights and advancement  
March 2009

Congratulations!

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**GR/2009**

*\*As prepared for delivery*